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ABSTRACT

This pilot project had four goals: (1) to develop a writing rubric with kindergartners; (2) to have students write to a prompt and record observed behaviors for analysis; (3) to better understand the appropriateness of using a writing rubric with kindergartners; and (4) to form more effective ways for students to be more autonomous in their writing. The teacher and students worked together to build criteria for a variety of normative tasks, including good work and good writing. They used brainstorming to develop criteria for different aspects of kindergarten writing in its relation to good writing. The teacher developed a computer-generated writing rubric and shared it with the students for their approval. The writing prompt and task were presented to the students with the rubric present; results were shared with each student during a teacher-student conference. The prompt writing task was replicated 4 weeks later. The results of the project indicated that students were extremely comfortable and confident with the prompt and rubric. Many students wanted to meet the criteria for good writing. Both students and the teacher were able to use the rubric during daily writing activities. Scores on the writing task improved over the 4-week period for most students. The use of the rubric was judged appropriate for kindergartners during the second half of the school year. (The writing rubric and examples of the writing prompts are appended. Contains 20 references.) (KB)

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Kindergarten Writing Rubric

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Assessment Project Paper

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Kyle Rhoads
Executive Summary
Kindergarten Writing Rubric Project

Approach: I piloted using a writing rubric with my kindergarten class. The process was similar to the assessment used in my own school to formally assess the writing of first and second graders.

Goals:

1. To develop a writing rubric with kindergarten students that could be used by both teacher and students as a sound assessment according to Stiggins' principles.

2. To have students experience a new task, writing to a prompt, and then recording observed behaviors for analysis.

3. To better understand the appropriateness and benefits of using a writing rubric with kindergarteners and the appropriateness of kindergarteners self-assessing their writing.

4. To form more effective ways for students to be more autonomous in their writing progress.

Strategies:

1. The students and I throughout the year built criteria for making a good line, snowy days, good work, and good writing.

2. The students and I brainstormed criteria of the different aspects of kindergarten writing in its relation to good (thumbs up) writing.

3. The rubric was computer generated. The rubric was shared with the class for approval.

4. The prompt and task were presented to the students. The students wrote what the picture prompt reminded them of. The rubric was present.

5. The results of the task were shared in conference with each student. The rubric was used by both students and teacher.

6. The prompt writing task was replicated four weeks later. Scores were analyzed.

Findings/Results: Students were extremely comfortable and confident with the prompt and the rubric. Many students wanted to meet the criteria for good (thumbs up) writing. Students and teacher were able to use the rubric during daily writing activities. Scores improved for most students. The use of a rubric seems appropriate for kindergarteners during the second half of kindergartener.

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The use of writing rubrics in primary classrooms has been something that has been used by many students and teachers. Schools in Maine such as Bowdoin Central and my own district, Freeport, have made it part of the formal assessment. The MEAs use a holistic writing rubric to score student work. My own school assesses first and second grade students once a year using a school-made rubric. When the first drafts of the rubric were being designed by a committee of teachers, having kindergarten students writing to a prompt and then being scored by the rubric was discussed. It was agreed that initially kindergarteners would be left out of the process. The reasons for not including them were as follows; that it was developmentally inappropriate, writing was not as big a focus as in the other grades, most students would score almost the same score. As a kindergarten teacher, I did not come away from the rubric work with a clear opinion of what place, if any, did kindergarten students play in the writing rubric process. I did feel that it was an area that needed to be further studied. Because of my personal interest with this topic, I will address, in this paper, the benefits and appropriateness of using a writing prompt and rubric with kindergarten students.

Current research seems to suggest a positive impact on student achievement with the use of writing rubrics in their classroom. Jeff Beaudry's research on holistic rubric seems to find a positive correlation between student achievement on the MEAs and the involvement of rubrics in their classroom. Many other studies seem to suggest similar positive impacts

of writing rubrics. Laura Graffam in her paper, Kindergarten Writing, wrote, "Although the use of a writer's rubric is experimental at this time, I felt both encouraged and surprised by the children's use of the rubric." (Graffam, p. 13) Her words supported my hope for success with a rubric. In Roseville Public Schools a nine week study involving eighteen first grade students and the use of a rubric along with a portfolio noted increases in scores of the holistic rubric. Anne Kleine of Edmonds School District #15 of Lynnwood, WA wrote of the benefits of using a writing rubric with her fourth and fifth grade students in a 1996 issue of Instructor. She listed the benefits as self-assessment of student work, useful to conference with students, and assessing and tracking progress formally. These are all benefits that I perceived could be formed from the use of a rubric in kindergarten. Students at Bailey Elementary School in Fairfax, VA ask kindergarten students to answer questions about their own writing. Teachers at the school had this to say, "Our goal, starting at kindergarten, is to make them a part of the assessment process so that they can take control of their own learning and teachers can facilitate learning." (Parker, p. 623) The article wrote that "students of all ages can reflect on their own learning." (Parker, p. 623) A belief that I shared which was crucial to the viability of my project.

Moreover, high school teachers in Pennsylvania, Sandra Wyngaard and Rachel Gherke, use a rubric to assess writing with their students. They feel "comfortable" using them with their

students because of the exactness of their expectations of achievement with the rubric. This notion seems to follow Stiggins' clear and appropriate targets for sound assessment. They believed the rubrics provided the feedback clearly about what was expected. Shelby Wolf and Maryl Gearhart of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing said regarding rubric use; "Assessment becomes a learning event an opportunity to examine current understanding and make decisions for future growth." This idea of assessment fits nicely with Stiggins' Principles of Sound Assessment- clear and appropriate targets and assessment as teaching and learning. Both of these principles are key to the use of the kindergarten writing rubric. Many more studies I researched noted an increase in scores with the use of writing rubrics (Priest, 1995, Accomando, 1996, and Richardson and Ruane 1996) but did not use them as a teaching and learning tool just as a testing instrument. I wanted the writing rubric to be more than a method to score writing. I wanted it to be a teaching and learning tool.

In Peter Johnston's book Knowing Literacy, Johnston explains that very young children are incapable of comparative judgment of ability and that as they get older they are able to make more normative judgments. This disturbed me because self-assessment and student participation in the development of the rubric would be necessary to any success. However, Johnston went on to quote, (Stipek and Daniels) "Although some kindergarteners can make such assessments of ability, the

normative framework is largely learned in school." Classrooms that emphasize normative comparisons foster this development faster than classrooms that do not. This seemed to justify future success since my students are involved in a variety of normative comparisons. Some of these normative task they experience throughout the year are making criteria for a "good line", for the kinds of weather, for "good work", and for "good writing". My morning class developed the criteria for "good writing" as leaving spaces when writing, writing the letters you hear, and telling about something when you write. The students have critiqued other kindergarteners writing based on their criteria of good writing. A poster of the criteria is displayed in close proximity to the students as they write daily. Students at times are asked by myself if they feel that their writing is "good." With increased exposure to the criteria the students level of sophistication with responses grew. Through my observation and student responses to the question such as "I left spaces and wrote about my trip to Florida" and "I wrote the letters that I hear in the words" students seemed to be using the criteria to assess their work. With the students displaying the ability to do this task, I moved on to begin developing a rubric with them that could be scored for their writing against a prompt. It is important to note that students of varying abilities as writers were able to self-assess using the criteria we had established.

However, as I researched to find any information or resources regarding writing prompts and rubrics for

kindergarteners my attempts were nil. I did find a minimal amount of information that I will share. Mike Estes, the Assessment Coordinator and an Assistant Principal for SAD #75 in Maine, helped his district develop a writing rubric beginning in 1978 to assess student writing grade one through five. Up until the last few years first grade teachers assessed students at the end of the year using the rubric. They have abandoned the practice in grade one since the first grade teachers do not feel that the rubric gives enough valuable information. Mike feels in the future first grade students will be assessed using some form of a writing rubric. When my school began to develop a grade one-two rubric we discovered a rubric for grade one that is currently used in a Maine school, though the origin of the rubric was unknown at this time by the committee chairperson at my school. Bowdoin Central School of SAD #75 has developed a K-6 analytical scoring guide for writing. The rubric in my opinion includes levels and language that could be used to score kindergarten writing. The use of the scoring guide did not seem consistent at the kindergarten level, however.

My first step thinking about a kindergarten rubric was to examine my own writing expectations for the majority of students as they exit kindergarten. Important to note is that my classes are heterogeneously grouped and contain between twelve and fourteen students. I, also, checked with the schools literacy specialist to see if she felt my expectations would lead students on a continuous path to achieving the Maine Learning Results objectives for second graders in the area of

writing. She felt that they would definitely do so.

To have a better understanding of what I'd need to consider when designing an analytic writing rubric, I gathered information from a variety of sources beyond which I have described. Eagan High school in Eagan, Minnesota has created a rubric with the topics beings ideas and content, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency. The topics gave me something to consider for writing at a more developed level. The topics seemed to have similarities and differences to the topics I chose to score for my writing rubric. The definitions for the criteria for scores were drastically different than ones appropriate for elementary. I, also, analyzed my middle schools writing rubric, as well as the one provided in our course packet which is used to score the MEAs. Analyzing all the rubrics helped me to develop major categories for criteria. Now, the development of expectations and the writing of criteria and descriptors for the categories needed to be accomplished.

I used a variety of sources to obtain information. I used my own schools work with developing literacy expectations. I considered my own expectations for students as writers when they leave kindergarten. I reviewed Gorham, S.A.D. #61, and S.A.D. #6 learning outcomes and assessment procedures for kindergarten writing. Some trends appeared from analyzing the school's work and my owns that an example of journal work was included in a year end portfolio, writing was described by stages such as emergent, transitional, and conventional, and their record keeping was responsible for displaying progress.

Standardized testing did not appear as part of the process. The assessing I examined seemed to follow the research of Samuel Meisel where he cited in his article, Remaking Classroom Assessment With The Work Sampling System, the need to do away with standardized tests and move toward using assessment "with specific criteria and well-defined procedures." (Meisels, 36.) The schools assessment procedures reviewed by myself seemed to reflect a move toward Meisel's and Stiggins' thinking. One of the main reasons my school developed a performance assessment in writing was to hopefully do away with using the California Achievement Tests to assess student writing in second grade.

After examining several ideas on expectations for kindergarten writing I had developed a clear picture of how I would hope the final rubric would look and the topics to score. Now, the process of brainstorming and crafting a rubric began.

First, I proceeded to get the students actively involved. Robert Camp says teachers need to view students "as active rather than passive learners when creating assessment." (Camp, 1, 1990) He agrees with Stiggins that students need to be aware of the process and must have experience in the creation process of performance assessment. Stiggins key to sound assessment, achievement targets clear and appropriate, was the first the class tackled. Specifically, we began the process by answering the question, "What kind of words would be really good writing?." Initially, I thought that their would be at least four levels of criteria for the four topics I considered important to kindergarten writing, but it became apparent as students started

to share ideas that this was too difficult a task. It rapidly became clear that students could understand three levels: good, O.K., not good. The three levels that appear on the rubric for scoring in the category words are what the students agreed upon consensually. We decide on the weather daily using a consensual model by using your thumb to display approval, disapproval, or that you can live with someone's suggestion. Therefore, we used a similar decision making procedure for the development of criteria for the rubric. Students were told from the beginning that we would be talking as a class in the next few weeks about the different parts of good writing and that we would be talking about only one part at a time. I, also, believe the topics (words, organization, details, and mechanics) I created seem to fit well with the students previous work of deciding what is good writing. Amazingly, during this first session of brainstorming and coming to an agreement on descriptors, the students stayed virtually on the topic of words. When examining organization and details, the students were not as clear about if their ideas fell under that category.

During our second session when we examined organization, I gave students verbal examples of writing in their journals and they told me which category they felt that the example fell and why. The answers became the descriptors. At this point, we were using our thumb to give a concrete reinforcer of what level of organization we thought the examples were. Students had strong positive reaction to the use of the thumb and therefore, became a key component to the process and the final

rubric.

In the third session, I asked them to tell me about what they thought the three levels of writing should tell. Thumbs down writing was agreed upon as writing a word after I gave the example of writing "bus." Several children then agreed that O.K. writing was when you wrote a complete thought. As the process went on, I learned what students had learned from my use of language during mini-lessons and writing conferences. The amazing part of this session was the student adamancy that thumbs up writing needed to be three or more complete thoughts (sentences). I thought they would consider one or two to be enough for thumbs up but I was pleasantly surprised since the majority of students already write one-two complete thoughts that they saw the need to improve the detail of their writing.

In the fourth session, I explained to the students that we would be talking about the "way our writing should look to be at the three different levels. I showed the students some journal examples and had them share their thoughts on what made the writing look good or made it thumbs up. The students quickly agreed that "thumbs up" had to have spaces between words as well as scribbling being thumbs up. The other criteria was not as easily discovered or agreed upon. Only after repeated examples and my use of prompting by asking about specific aspects of the writing did we form the majority of criteria. Actually, the descriptors about directionality were only decided upon later on that day when a group of students exclaimed that writing left to right was important to do for good writing after I had

just explained to another student the way print moves. The idea was presented to the class and it was easily added.

The next step in the process was transforming the student's rich ideas into a one-page rubric that they could use to assess their work after being introduced to the rubric. I, also, needed to decide on at least two prompts to be used for the two directed writings I planned. Building the rubric using a spreadsheet program was not an easy task. I felt the need to have large print for students to read and large boxes for them to exist in. Getting the right fit was a belaboring task but after much trial and error, I felt comfortable with my results. The next problem was finding a way to have the rubric print out on a single piece of paper. I had to do lots of legwork to be able to include a picture of a thumb within the rubric. This would allow students to assess their writing in each category by using their thumb. I could use a one, two, or three, scoring guide for each category to get an analytical score.

Next, I determined the prompt that students would write from on April 15th. When I was on my school's writing rubric committee, we had collected possible pictures to use from a variety of sources. I used the ones I had in my possession and received some other picture prompts from a fellow colleague who was planning to use prompts with her students. I chose to use the prompts enclosed because I felt a wide range of students would have had related experiences, high interest, and high motivation to write about them.

I then wrote a script to read to the students before

presenting the prompt and having them write towards it. My goal was to was to focus students writing and to clear up any misconceptions about the directions. The script goes like this; "Today, you are going to write about a picture. Your job is not to tell what you see in the picture but to write about something it reminds you of or of something you have done. You may make up a story. Please remember that we have been learning how to write more than one complete thought, leave spaces between words, tell more than what you are doing, and write the letters that you hear. Do you have any questions about your job? Begin and please raise your hand if you have any questions as you work. Let's show our good work!" I told the that they students may draw along with their writing some chose to draw others did not. After they were finished, I added this statement, "Please, check over your work to see if it is your good work." Students were allowed to use most resources for normal writing work such as their personal word books, environmental print, and a spacer for leaving spaces. They were not able to use an adult for help. No student asked for help either. I learned that the students understood their role as writers and like it or not test takers since only one child attempted to get help from another student. Without me telling them that this needed to be their own work. They knew it.

My analysis of the process with students was that they felt comfortable writing to a prompt. Only one child did not write and be able to explain how his writing was related to the prompt. A few asked questions about how long they had to

write, could they draw, did they have to draw, how long did it have to be. Questions I might normally get with a new writing activity. Overall, the students' seemed excited about writing towards a prompt. I did not see a student seek out the rubric that they had in front of them. However, I sensed some students had internalized some of the rubric by the way they were attempting to add to their writing, talking about trying to leave spaces between, attempting to leave periods. Students I had never seen display these abilities before did so. Some even checked their spelling by using their word book. Before I had even scored the twelve students' work, I was pleased with my observations of the process and student work.

As I scored student work some patterns came to light. Most students scored three (thumbs up) in organization. We have stressed this component of writing in the last two months but I, also, feel maybe students should be trying to write more than one detail about what they were doing in the story, and some did so in this session. Most scored twos in the other categories. Only one student scored a three in mechanics and I think it was because periods and spacing are emerging skills for many. I believe, the results are fine and give the students something to grow towards as they assess their writing more using the rubric. My teaching partner scored the papers, also. Her scores were very similar to my own. I wanted to get another person's opinion before showing the students my thoughts on their writing and hearing their own thoughts. I was excited to hear their thoughts.

I met with each student as if the writing was from their journal so we met in a conference format that was familiar to them. Therefore, the level of threat was low. The majority of students opinions on their scores in categories were the same as mine. A few students seemed to score themselves higher, even though, they could not justify their score. These students seemed to be the students whom have had difficulty self-assessing all year. The reasons, I believe could be developmental or personality related. Overall, students seemed engaged in the process by their body language and responses. Some of the student comments are as follows: "I left periods so it's thumbs up.", "I only wrote two complete thoughts.", "I can spell that word.", and "I wrote about more than two things."

I felt that this type of assessment of kindergarten writing matched well with Stiggins' keys to sound assessment. The achievement targets were clear and appropriate since students were key builders and users of the rubric. They had my guidance in keeping the criteria appropriate for kindergarten writers. The criteria seemed appropriate since the expectations were similar to previous kindergarten class expectations. The purpose was clear since writing and progressing as a writer has been a continuing focus since the first week of kindergarten. The reason for discussing about good writing and why we would try to improve as writers by using a new technique was familiar from their work and previous learning experiences. The method for assessing their writing was appropriate since students wrote like they do daily using the same paper, most of the same

resources, and the assessing took place in their own classroom which was a comfortable setting. The only new piece was that they had to write to a prompt to match my own school's procedure for assessing first and second grade writing. Students were, also, accustomed to not receiving much support from their teachers. Most kindergarteners, I have found, write independently at their own level by April. As a whole the students writing on this task reflected their current level of performance as a writer and their progress, this year as a writer. As with any assessment, this one is not perfect and I believe most biases and distortions can be eliminated by the repeated use of the rubric and the fine tuning of the rubric as students' abilities change and as the teacher's learning outcomes change. Two students I felt did not meet up to the score that I expected them to get on the rubric, but many more scored higher than I expected. Students seemed to rise to the calling of the assessment.

The rubric itself seemed to address some of the guiding principles of sound assessment that Stiggins writes about. Students are key users of the process and are included in the assessment. The assessment is classroom based and reflects well classroom practice and student work. The targets were clear and appropriate since they were student designed, they had been repeatedly explained to students and were visually in proximity as they did the task of writing. The assessment is being used both for teaching and learning since now the rubric will be used by both myself and the students. Students will

self-assess their writing on a routine if not daily basis to check their learning and growth as a writer. With my teaching, I can encourage student writing development by referring to the rubric to show them where their writing should be going. I can be much clearer about the learning outcomes related to writing through the use of the rubric. I think the most powerful feature of the rubric as a teaching tool is the student-craftsmanship of it which allows them to have the powerful motivator of ownership. It was apparent, after even the initial activity, that students wanted to meet their class expectations. The thinking and communication that goes on with the forming and using of the rubric supports the principle of clear thinking and effective communication. Dialogue and brainstorming between student and teacher took place. Conferencing during the use of the rubric takes place for ongoing effective communication. Student thinking is encouraged to refine the rubric and for students and teachers to clarify their idea of the rubrics learning objectives. The authenticism, student participation, and the ongoing use of the rubric support it as a high quality assessment.

Jay Mctighe writes in his article, What Happens between Assessment?, of the need for a performance orientation to assessment so that ongoing assessment can take place for feedback and adjustment. His view of quality assessment contained many of the same components as Stiggins. He felt the establishing of clear performance targets and the goal of teaching for understanding fit together as a powerful means of linking

curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Mctighe felt that criteria and standards should be published so students know what to do to improve. The key to Mctighe 's writing was that assessment is more than something that is measured at the end of an unit. Stiggins' writing seems to follow similar beliefs regarding assessment.

The second task of writing to a prompt took place during the first week of May. Students displayed behaviors similar to the first task. Many students scored higher on the second task such as the examples provided. Students moved quickly to write towards the prompt. Two students had parts of the rubric read to them after they indicated that they wanted to know specifically how to do thumbs up writing. As with the first task, the rubric and prompt was present throughout the task. Once again the prompt seemed appropriate. All students were able to use the prompt to write effectively. The students awareness of expectations and criteria for good writing seemed to continue to grow.

After completing the second task and reflecting on the process of this task, I was able to analyze how the project contributes to the roles of assessment. This project allowed students and teacher a vehicle to assess, teach and learn about student writing by developing a rubric. The rubric as a learning tool can be powerful. Assessment needs to be tied to classroom practice to be of quality. Student ownership of the process as well as having a forum to self-assess plays a part in the rubric being an effective assessment tool. Student comfort

with the task seemed to be related to authenticism and to a lesser degree ownership and design.

A barrier to quality assessment not mentioned is the lack of time. However, the rubric can be time efficient since it is both a teaching and learning tool. This can not be said about all assessments used in schools. Another barrier to quality assessment can be assessing without good reason. The writing rubric seems to reflect well with both the learning results for K-2 writing as well as the format for assessing MEA writing tasks. Another barrier that I often find to quality assessment is student not seeing the meaning behind the assessment and students not having stake in the process and the tool. Because of the student behaviors displayed during his project, I believe, students saw the meaningfulness of the task by their effort, comfort, and willingness to participate. In the future, I am going to attempt for students to have even more ownership in the process and task of assessing writing in kindergarten with a rubric.

To increase ownership I will try to use more graphics and pictures to represent student ideas and to convey their ideas to the criteria that make up the final rubric. I believe the use of using as much of the student language in the rubric allowed the students to understand it and feel ownership, but representing ideas through more pictures may allow for more students to have a better sense of ownership especially the students whose reading skills are weak. Students will, also, compare kindergarten writing examples to form a clearer

understanding of the criteria for thumbs up writing. I believe, the process and rubric could be improved by allowing for more time to develop the rubric and to allow students more opportunity and time to self-assess. Student will progress and find the rubric a more effective learning tool without the parameters of this project and course. Continuing, I would revisit the rubric periodically with students as their writing develops to have the students continue to see and use the rubric as a vehicle to progress with their writing and to be a learning tool and at the same time a teaching and assessing tool for myself.

Overall, I am quite pleased with the discoveries and outcomes of this project. I achieved the majority of my goals for this project. (Please, see enclosed concept map.) The rubric, prompt, and assessment task are appropriate with kindergarteners. Students were comfortable and displayed great effort and motivation. Time constraints and the small use of pictorial representation were areas that I will target for improvement of the process and the rubric. Also, because of this project, I have a stronger understanding of the appropriateness and effectiveness of a kindergarten rubric and kindergarten students writing to a prompt. Because of these and other positive findings from this project I am glad I attempted and completed piloting a kindergarten rubric.

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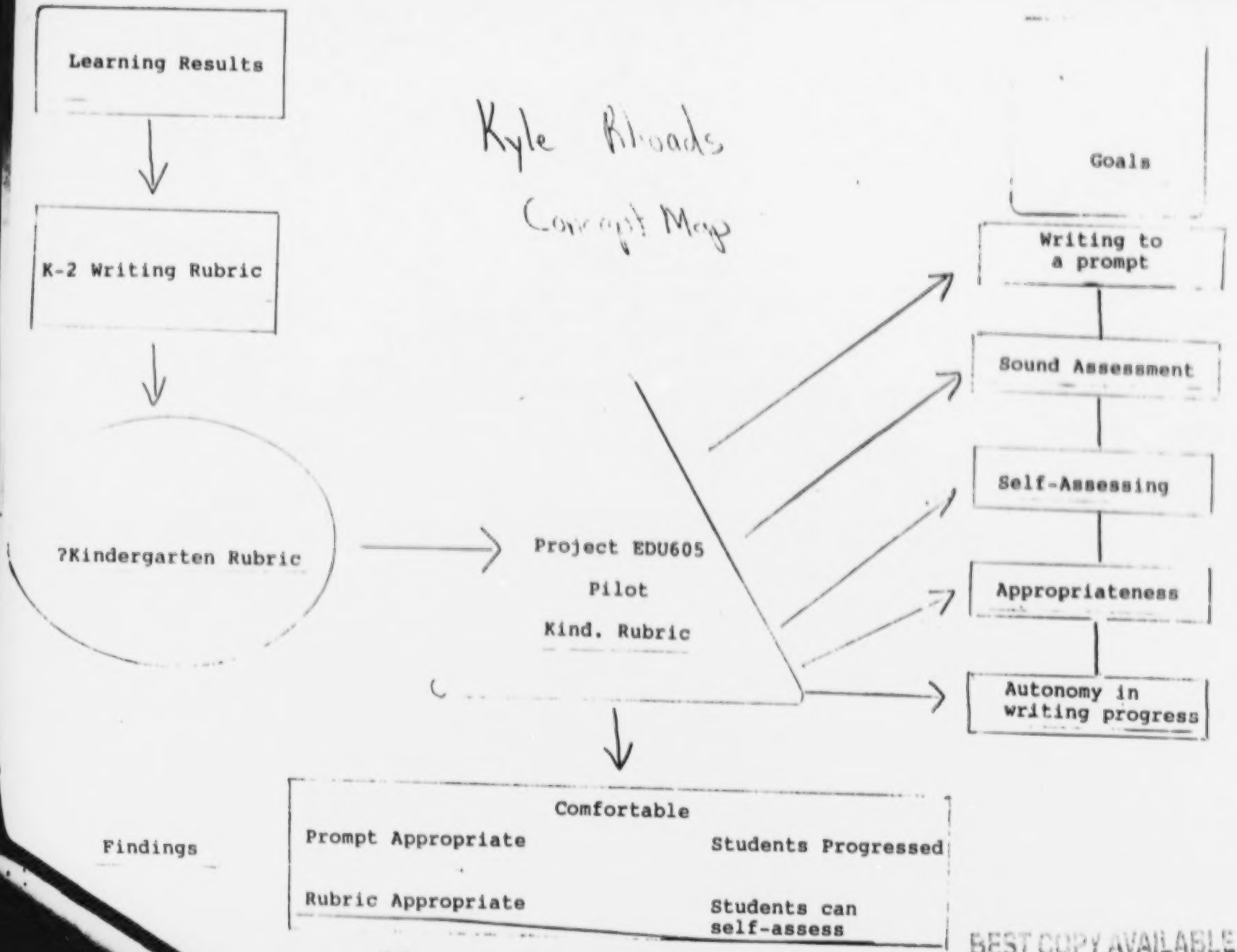
APPENDICES

ROOM 8 KINDERGARTEN WRITING RUBRIC

	WORDS	ORGANIZ.	DETAILS	MECHANICS
	Wrote the letters that you hear. Spelled words you knew (word book)	Told more than what you are doing	3 complete thoughts or more (sentences)	Spaces Pencil Writing Some periods Wrote L-R and Top - Bottom
	Wrote the letters that you hear	Told what you are doing	1 or 2 complete thoughts	Some spaces Pencil and crayon writing
	Did not write the letters that you hear	Did not tell what you are doing	A word or bunch of words	Scribbled No spaces between words Crayon writing



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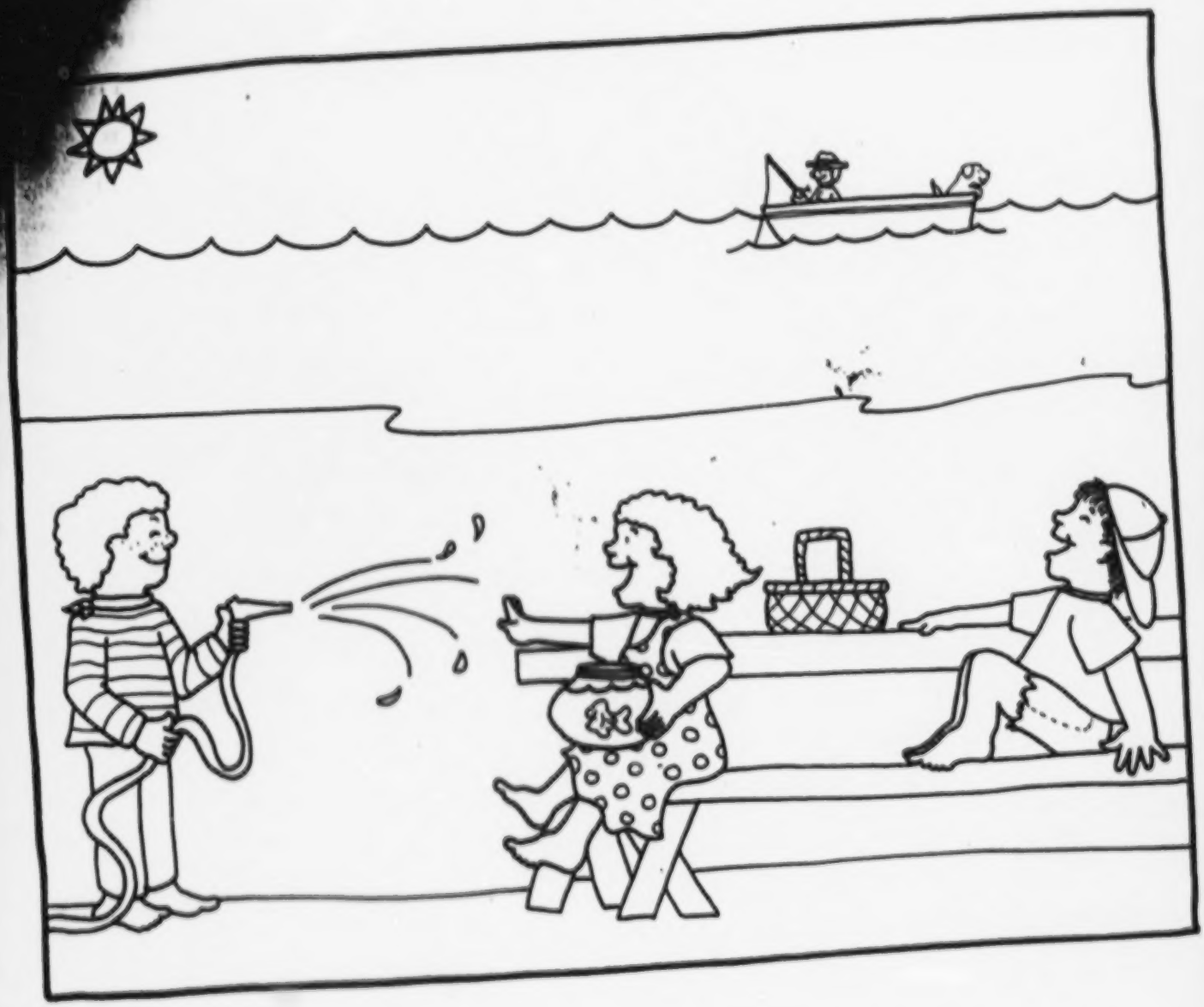

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"Today, you are going to write about a picture. Your job is not to tell what you see in the picture but to write about something it reminds you of or of something you have done. You may make up a story. Please remember that we have been learning how to write more than one complete thought, leave spaces between words, tell more than what you are doing, and write the letters that you hear. Do you have any questions about your job? Begin and please raise your hand if you have any questions as you work. Let's show our good work!" I told the that they students may draw along with their writing some chose to draw others did not. After they were finished, I added this statement, "Please, check over your work to see if it is your good work." Students were allowed to use most resources for normal writing work such as their personal word books, environmental print, and a spacer for leaving spaces. They were not able to use an adult for help.

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